

Message Text

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TO USMISSION SINAI

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SUBJECT: ARTICLE RE SINAI FIELD MISSION

1. MARCH 1 EDITION OF TIME MAGAZINE CARRIES STORY ENTITLED
"THE SINAI'S WILLING HOSTAGES" WHICH READS AS FOLLOWS:

BEGIN QUOTE

2. ATOP A SERE, WINDBOWN HILL RISING 2,000 FT ABOVE THE
CENTRAL SINAI DESERT, 170 AMERICAN MEN AND WOMEN THIS WEEK
ASSUME THE TASK OF SECURING THE FRAGILE PEACE BETWEEN EGYPT
AND ISRAEL. DRESSED IN BRIGHT ORANGE UNIFORMS - SO THAT
THEY CAN BE EASILY SEEN AGAINST THE SUN-BAKED SAND - THE
MEMBERS OF THE STATE DEPARTMENT'S SINAI FIELD MISSION ARE
OPERATING MONITORING STATIONS IN THE GIDDI AND MITLA PASSES,
SCENE OF THREE WARS IN THE PAST 20 YEARS. THE PUNY AMERICAN
PRESENCE COULD SCARCELY HALT AN ARMORED COLUMN INTENT ON
STARTING A FOURTH WAR. RATHER, SINCE EGYPT AND ISRAEL TRUST
WASHINGTON MORE THAN THEY TRUST EACH OTHER, THE AMERICANS
ARE IN THE PASSES AS HOSTAGES FOR PEACE.

3. THE U.S. MISSION IS PART OF A SERIES OF COMPLICATED
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MOVES WORKED OUT DURING HENRY KISSINGER'S MIDDLE EAST SHUT-

TLE LAST SEPTEMBER. LAST WEEK ISRAELI FORCES IN THE SINAI EVACUATED 1,660 SQUARE MILES OF CAPTURED EGYPTIAN TERRITORY, INCLUDING THE KEY PASSES THAT ISRAEL HAS HELD SINCE THE '67 WAR. EGYPTIAN TROOPS MOVED FORWARD AND OCCUPIED THE TERRITORY UP TO THE WESTERN APPROACHES TO THE PASSES. THE TWO SIDES APPARENTLY WORKED OUT THE LATEST MOVE AFFABLY. RELATIONS WERE FAR BETTER THAN WE EXPECTED," REPORTED ONE ISRAELI OFFICER. "WE DRANK COFFEE AND PLAYED SOCCER TOGETHER. IF WE KEPT UP THIS ATMOSPHERE, WE COULD HAVE PEACE." A 4,400 MAN UNITED NATIONS EMERGENCY FORCE NEVERTHELESS TOOK UP POSITIONS IN A BUFFER ZONE BETWEEN THE TWO ARMIES. THE AMERICANS WILL MONITOR ANY MOVEMENT BY THE TWO ARMIES FROM THREE WATCH STATIONS IN THE PASSES. SO WILL MORE SOPHISTICATED ISRAELI AND EGYPTIAN STATIONS NEARBY, KNOWN RESPECTTIVELY AS J-1 AND E-1 (FROM MAP COORDINATES, NOT ETHNIC SHORTHAND), THAT WERE BUILT WITH U.S. ASSISTANCE.

4. THE AMERICANS, ALL NONMILITARY VOLUNTEERS, WILL OPERATE FROM A BARREN HILL IN THE GIDDI PASS 30 MILES EAST OF THE SUEZ CANAL. IN SCARCELY FOUR WEEKS, THE AREA HAS BEEN CONVERTED INTO A SELF-CONTAINED LITTLE AMERICA. TEMPORARY BARRACKS AND A MESS HALL WERE FLOWN IN FROM THE U.S., ALONG WITH GENERATORS, ELECTRIC FLY CATCHERS, XEROX COPIERS, AND EVEN 'PORTA POTTI' TOILETS. BY SEPTEMBER PREFABRICATED CONCRETE MODULES WILL BE IN PLACE. SAND IS EVEN BEING SHIPPED INTO THE SINAI IN A COALS-TO-NEWCASTLE OPERATION; THE LOCAL SAND IS SO SALT-SATURATED THAT IT IS USELESS FOR CEMENT MIXING.

5. ONCE WORK CREWS DEPART, THE VILLAGE WILL BE OCCUPIED BY 28 GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES AND 142 TECHNICIANS, MAINTENANCE WORKERS AND CLERKS HIRED BY E-SYSTEMS, INC., A DALLAS-BASED ELECTRONICS COMPANY. SIX OF THE CONTINGENT ARE WOMEN. UNDER A CONTRACT THAT WILL EVENTUALLY AMOUNT TO \$10 MILLION ANNUALLY, SHIFTS OF E-SYSTEMS EXPERTS WILL OPERATE THREE WATCH STATIONS FROM WHICH FOUR SENSOR FIELDS AT EITHER END OF BOTH PASSES WILL BE AUTOMATICALLY MONITORED.

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6. WATCH SYSTEM. ASIDE FROM UNEXPLODED ORDNANCE (WORKMEN HAVE ALREADY FOUND TWO ROCKETS AND A 500-LB BOMB AT THE AMERICAN SITE), THE TWELVE-TO 18-MONTH DUTY TOURS ARE NOT LIKELY TO BE EXCEPTIONALLY HAZARDOUS. BESIDES, SAYS C. WILLIAM KONTOS, WHO HEADS THE STATE DEPARTMENT SECTION OVERSEEING THE MISSION "ON THE ONE SIDE YOU HAVE THE WHOLE OF THE ISRAELI ARMY, ON THE OTHER THE WHOLE OF THE EGYPTIAN ARM, PLUS 4,400 UN TROOPS IN BETWEEN."

7. LIVING CONDITIONS ARE LIKELY TO BE DIFFICULT AT BEST. PERSONNEL AT THE BASE HAVE TO SCRAPE FROST OFF THE WIND-SHIELDS OF THEIR JEEPS EACH MORNING, BUT BEFORE LONG THEY WILL BE SWEATING OUT MIDDAY TEMPERATURES THAT CAN REACH 130 DEGREES IN UNSHADED AREAS. FLIES AND SANDSTORMS ARE ROUTINE, HAILSTORMS ARE SEASONAL. TO EASE THE INEVITABLE BOREDOM, THERE WILL BE TENNIS, VOLLEYBALL, MOVIES AND TELEVISION FROM BOTH CAIRO AND TEL AVIV. THERE WILL BE NO SWIMMING POOL, HOWEVER, BECAUSE THERE IS NOT ENOUGH WATER.

8. FOR ALL THE OBVIOUS DISCOMFORT, AFTER THE WATCH SYSTEM WAS PROPOSED LAST FALL, THERE WERE 3,000 APPLICANTS FOR THE E-SYSTEMS JOBS, WHICH PAY BETWEEN \$17,000 AND \$25,000 ANNUALLY, AS WELL AS A LONG LIST OF VOLUNTEERS FOR THE GOVERNMENT POSTS. THE DESERT FORCE IS HEADED BY NICHOLAS G.W. (FOR GRACIAN WARD) THORNE 55, A RETIRED MARINE OFFICER WITH SANDY REGIMENTAL MUSTACHE WHO FOR 14 YEARS HAS BEEN A GLOBE-TREKKING STATE DEPARTMENT TROUBLESHOOTER. ONE OF THORNE'S PRIMARY CONCERNS IS TO MAINTAIN A PAINSTAKING NEUTRALITY. MISSION MEMBERS WILL BE REQUIRED TO SPLIT THEIR LEAVES BETWEEN CAIRO AND TEL AVIV, EACH ABOUT FIVE HOURS AWAY BY CAR. OF NINE WIVES WHO WILL ACCOMPANY THE PARTY, THE FIVE WITH NO CHILDREN WILL BE SENT TO CAIRO AND THE FOUR WITH CHILDREN TO TEL AVIV, WHERE THE SCHOOLS ARE BETTER. THORNE, THE MODEL OF NEUTRALITY, MAINTAINS AN APARTMENT IN EACH CITY.

9. IMPORTANT PRESENCE. BECAUSE THE EGYPTIAN AND ISRAELI SURVEILLANCE STATIONS CAN DETECT ANYTHING THAT MOVES IN THE AREA, SOME OBSERVERS CONSIDER THE U.S. MISSION'S ASSIGNMENT USELESS. "THEY MIGHT AS WELL SPEND ALL THEIR TIME AT THAT COMFORTABLE BASE CAMP OF THEIRS, FOR ALL THE GOOD THEY WILL

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BE DOING," SAYS ONE WESTERN OFFICER. ASKS ANOTHER: "YOU KNOW WHAT SFM REALLY STANDS FOR? SINGULARLY FUTILE MISSION." REPLIES THORNE: "IN A WAY, OUR PRESENCE IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN WHAT WE DO." HE IS RIGHT. BOTH SIDES ARE APT TO THINK HARD ABOUT A NEW OFFENSIVE IF IT MEANS ROLLING OVER THE U.S. STATION. ALTHOUGH THE AMERICANS CAN BE WITHDRAWN UNILATERALLY BY WASHINGTON, THEY EXPECT TO STAY INDEFINITELY AS PROOF OF THE U.S. COMMITMENT TO PRESERVING PEACE IN THE MIDDLE EAST. END QUOTE. INGERSOLL

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